

## 1. INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE

Rail has successfully been operated in America for almost 183 years. Between 1825 and 1900, American railroads grew quickly - from 23 track miles in 1830 to 231,540 miles in 1908. However, from 1908 through 2004, track miles of the major (Class I) railroads decreased by 131,414 miles. In order to truly develop a rail plan for the future, we must understand what has and is happening to railroads and other transportation modes, what are the future trends related to population, the economy, natural resources, and our environment that will influence our future prosperity.

This plan is built on an understanding of five fundamentals: the current environment and conditions, the goals and vision that support future prosperity, identification of projects that support the goals and visions, identification and establishment of strategic partnerships, and a business model and financial resources available to secure the goals and vision that support future prosperity.

The primary purpose of the Virginia Statewide Rail Plan (VSRP) is to provide a defined vision for rail transportation in the Commonwealth of Virginia. It represents a Business Plan that incorporates the aforementioned fundamentals, along with principles and planning horizons that are consistent with the Commonwealth's Six Year Improvement Plan and long range vision that is currently being updated in VTrans2035. The VSRP includes a Resource Allocation Plan that details project selection and prioritization, funding, and implementation schedules.

The Statewide Rail Plan has been developed to comply with both the VTrans 2035 planning process and the Federal Railroad Administration's requirements detailed in 49 CFR 266.15 Requirements for a State Rail Plan. This plan was developed using a three step process which incorporated public hearings and comments of the following documents:

- Draft Six Year Improvement Plan for all modes of transportation by the Commonwealth (roads, rail, aviation, ports, and other miscellaneous modes)
- 2008 Statewide Rail Plan (December 2008)
- Statewide Rail Resource Allocation Plan (December 2008)

The Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation (DRPT) is the lead state agency for rail, transit and congestion management in Virginia. DRPT has the flexibility to provide diverse transportation solutions to move more people and goods statewide by focusing on projects that deliver public benefits for the investment of public funds. As part of this approach, DRPT must periodically identify rail needs, priority corridors, and capacity chokepoints across the state in order to maintain the strategic plan and vision for rail transportation in Virginia.

This plan represents an update of the Statewide Rail Plan published in 2004. Moving forward, DRPT will revise the statewide plan every five years with annual updates. In addition the Six Year Improvement Program (SYIP) will be updated annually to keep pace with emerging trends, priorities and needs.

The VSRP is intended to provide detailed information on existing rail conditions and programs in Virginia today and rail needs for the future, with a focus on identifying key transportation corridors, scenarios for investment and project identification for the short term and long term. Short term projects are those that could be implemented within six years and long term projects are those that could be implemented within the twenty five-year planning horizon of 2035.

Proposed funding (state, federal, local, and private sector) and an implementation plan based on existing and potential new revenue sources for selected projects is included, as well as the allocation of resources between passenger and freight rail projects statewide. A primary focus has been identifying specific projects for funding and implementation over the next six years. Projects will be developed based on the needs and priorities identified in the Statewide Rail Plan, and the selection of projects for implementation in the next six years has been guided by the evaluation of projects based on the achievement of state transportation goals and the determination of public benefits to be achieved through each project.

The VSRP contains short and long term rail priorities for Virginia, providing direction for critical rail projects that will support a cost-effective and efficient rail network. Ultimately, rail transportation in Virginia will provide more transportation choices for people and goods, congestion relief for the state's highway system, energy savings through reduced fuel consumption and better air quality through reduced emissions.

The VSRP has been developed in coordination with other Commonwealth transportation agencies, including the State Transportation Mobility (Multimodal) Office, Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT), the Virginia Port Authority (VPA), the Virginia Department of Aviation (DOAV), and the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR). Input was also received from major rail stakeholders including the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA), the Virginia Economic Development Partnership (VEDP), Norfolk Southern (NS), CSX Transportation (CSX), Amtrak, Virginia Railway Express (VRE), Regional Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPO), Regional Planning District Commissions (PDC), Virginia's ten shortline railroads, the U.S. military (U.S. Army Surface Deployment Command), and other organizations. Public input was also included through a comprehensive public involvement program.

The relatively close proximity of the rail network in the Commonwealth to major highway transportation corridors is shown in Figure 1-1. Implementation of key rail improvements provide cost-effective and environmentally friendly alternatives to remove passenger cars from congested highway systems by providing improved passenger rail service, and to remove trucks from congested highway systems by providing improved freight rail service.

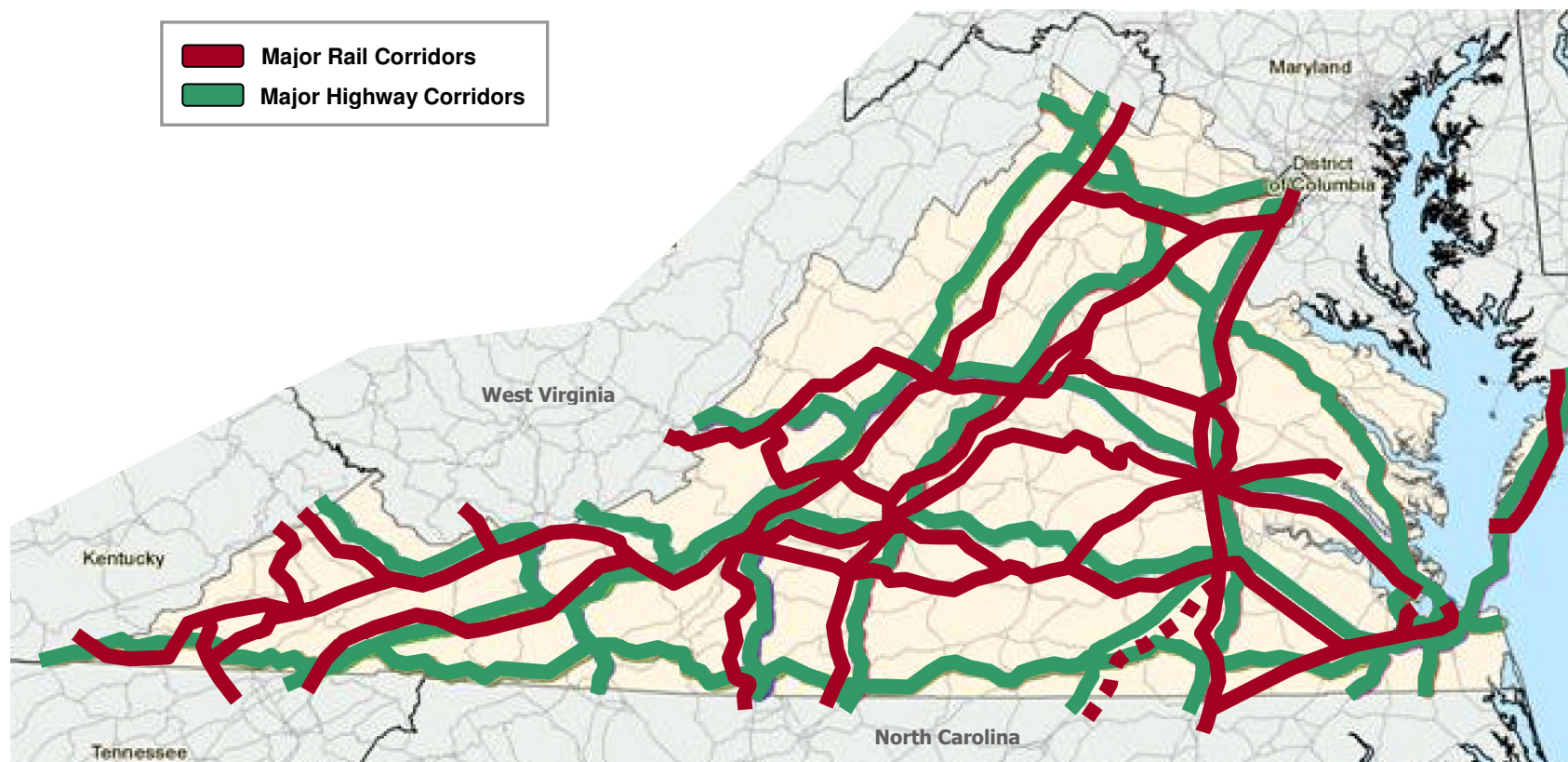


Figure 1- 1 Virginia Rail and Highway Corridors

## **1.1. FRA Requirements**

This Chapter of the VSRP presents information related to DRPT's development of the VSRP as required by 49 CFR § 266.15 (a) and 49 CFR § 266.15 (c)(2).

The data required by 49 CFR § 266.15 (c)(2) is presented in Figures 1-1 Virginia Rail and Highway Corridors.

## **1.2. Virginia's Strategic Transportation Planning Process**

The Commonwealth's strategic transportation planning process supports the development of a comprehensive statewide multimodal Six Year Improvement Plan (SYIP) and long-range transportation improvement plan to a 2035 planning horizon through the four state transportation modal agencies - Department of Aviation, Department of Rail and Public Transportation, Port Authority, and Department of Transportation. The transportation plan is developed with opportunities for public input and comment throughout the process. The general transportation planning process is shown in Figure 1-2 and included the following sequential phases:

### **1.2.1. Purpose and Need**

The purpose of the VSRP is twofold, to ensure compliance with FRA requirements and to meet the state transportation planning process and goals set forth.

### **1.2.2. Data Collection and Analysis**

Data collection includes existing conditions; socio-economic conditions; environmental and historic resources impacts; environmental justice; available resources and capital; and land use impact. Data analysis includes: strengths; weaknesses; opportunities; threats; service gaps; and mitigating factors beyond agency control.

### **1.2.3. Goals and Objectives**

Goals are general statements that address what action will be taken to address: strengths; weaknesses; opportunities; threats; and service gaps. Objectives are quantifiable measures used to help achieve the stated goal.

### **1.2.4. Planning Guidelines**

Description of policies and programs developed to address the goals and objectives, including: ways to maintain or expand upon existing strengths; how to correct weaknesses;

how to take advantage of opportunities; how to deal with potential threats; and how to fill service gaps.

### 1.2.5. Implementation

Includes the determination of projects to be implemented that help achieve policies or implement programs. These projects would be divided into short range – within six years and can be included in the Commonwealth’s Six Year Improvement Plan (SYIP); medium range – seven to 15 years and could be added to the six year plan if certain conditions are met; and a long range plan – 15-20 years and would include additional actions necessary to turn ideas into projects. The long term plan horizon for the Commonwealth is the year 2035.

### 1.2.6. Plan Evaluation

Determines what situations or events have changed that affect the plan. Are objectives being reached? Do projects selected help meet stated goals? Plan evaluation also includes any corrective measures that must be taken to meet goals and objectives.

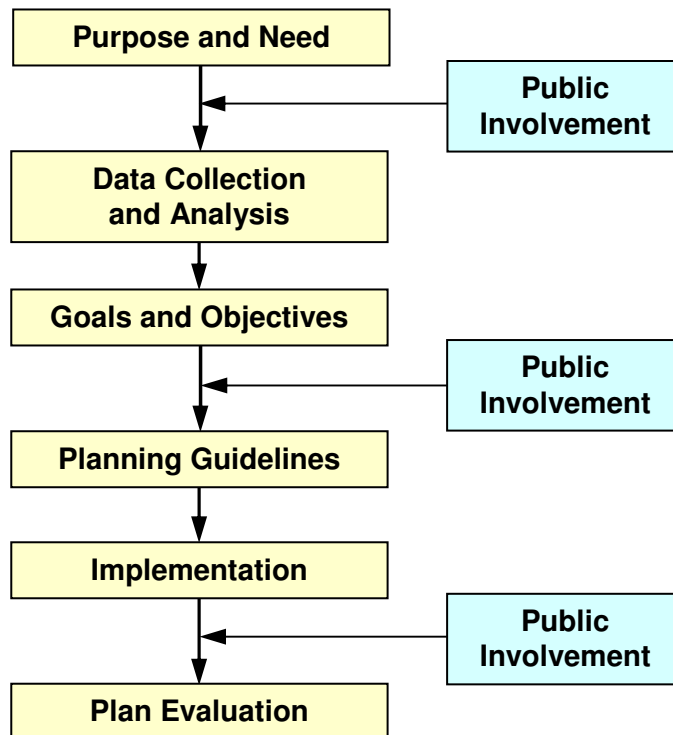


Figure 1-2. Strategic Transportation Planning Process

### **1.3. Public Involvement**

The DRPT planning process actively sought public review and comments throughout the development of the Statewide Rail Plan and its related documents.

#### **1.3.1. Six Year Improvement Plan**

Based on input from all transportation agencies (including DRPT), the Commonwealth developed a draft SYIP (2009 – 2014) for public review and comment. In addition to comments submitted through the Commonwealth's website, any comments were submitted after the SYIP presentations at the following public hearings:

April 16, 2008 – Lynchburg, VA  
April 21, 2008 – Bristol, VA  
April 23, 2008 – Richmond, VA  
April 24, 2008 – Chesapeake, VA  
April 30, 2008 – Harrisonburg, VA (Hampton Roads)  
May 14, 2008 – Northern Virginia

#### **1.3.2. 2008 Statewide Rail Plan:– December 12, 2008**

A 2008 Statewide Rail Plan was developed by DRPT which identified the Commonwealth's rail system for freight and passenger rail, as well as the estimated needs and costs associated with potential rail improvement projects. In addition to comments through DRPT's website, any comments were also be submitted after the 2008 Statewide Rail Plan presentations at the following public hearings:

July 16, 2008 – Richmond, VA  
July 23, 2008 – Staunton, VA  
July 24, 2008 – Roanoke, VA  
July 29, 2008 – Northern Virginia  
July 30, 2008 – Chesapeake, VA (Hampton Roads)

Comments from these public hearings were utilized in the subsequent development by DRPT of a recommended Rail Resource Allocation Plan which included priorities and funding sources for proposed short term and long term rail improvement projects.

The majority of the comments received during the public comment period encouraged increased passenger and freight rail service in Virginia's major corridors, including I-81, I-95, I-64 and US 29. Overwhelming support was received for passenger rail service between Lynchburg and Washington, D.C., and many who commented requested that the service be extended to Roanoke and Bristol. Regarding freight rail service, many supported freight rail enhancement throughout Virginia and specifically in the I-81 corridor.

Regarding funding, comments generally encouraged DRPT to secure dedicated funding for freight and passenger rail service, opposed opening the Mass Transit Trust Fund to

passenger rail projects and opposed requiring local funding for intercity passenger rail projects.

Finally, it was important to the vast majority of those who sent comments that the projects proposed in the Draft Statewide Rail Plan provide environmental benefits such as reduced dependence on oil, improved air quality and the preservation of historic and culture resources as well as natural resources.

### **1.3.3. Statewide Rail Resource Allocation Plan – December 15, 2008**

In accordance with a mandate from the Virginia General Assembly, DRPT prepared a separate Rail Resource Allocation Plan which provided recommended project priorities for passenger and freight rail improvements. The Resource Allocation Plan included prioritized projects, recommended funding sources, and schedules for implementing selected projects that would involve taxpayer dollars (projects financed solely by the private sector railroads were not included in the funding recommendations).